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Maternal Nurturing in *Beloved*

In her novel *Beloved*, author Toni Morrison makes domestic implications based on Seethe’s racial background, which is that of a black female who is caught in the despair that slavery brings to her domestic life. Throughout the novel, Morrison references slavery and describes the mistreatment of slaves, especially women, which show the effects these have on domesticity. Specifically, this response paper will analyze these aspects that are shown in the sixth chapter of *Beloved*. In this chapter, Morrison implies the importance of maternal nurture by using stories from both Seethe’s upbringing and her present life with Denver and Beloved to show readers the difficulty that slaves have faced.

One of the major points Morrison focuses on in chapter six of *Beloved* is the importance of maternal nurture. In real life, maternal nurture is important to domesticity because it is an expected skill for a wife to possess. In *Beloved*, Morrison shows that although this is an expected asset of a mother, it is not always present due to the struggles of slavery. Seethe and her mother are examples of how slavery can affect one’s ability to be a nurturing and loving mother. Seethe shows a nurturing side to her as she takes the time to tell Beloved stories, which she enjoys doing because she sees the joy that it brings to Beloved. Beloved is obsessed with Seethe, and the way that she seeks the nurture and love from Seethe parallels the way a baby seeks nurture and love from its mother. Although she can handle Beloved’s obsessive behavior, such as when she walks home with her, touches her, and longs to listen to her stories, Seethe would not tolerate this behavior from Denver. This is because she correlates independence with growing up as a child of a slave (Morrison 68). Morrison emphasizes the theme of destructed maternal nurturing in the paragraph that begins “I didn’t see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo (Morrison 72)”, by portraying the distance between Seethe and her mother and the pain it caused her. Interestingly enough, Seethe is folding laundry when she flashes back to her childhood memories of a nurturing mother-like figure Nan, “who was around all day, who nursed babies, cooked” (Morrison 73). It is notable that she turns to a stereotypically female domestic job to distract her while she is numb from her painful memories.

Although there are more examples of the effects of a lack in nurture throughout *Beloved*, Morrison does an effective job of specifically focusing on maternal nurtur~~ing~~ in chapter six. The parenting of Seethe, her mother, and Baby Suggs are all mentioned in this chapter, but since Seethe is the main character of the novel, and her upbringing directly affects her, it is critical to concentrate on her and her mother. Together they are a good example of how the horrible life of slavery and mistreatment of women influence one’s capability to love and nurture a child.